

Diversity impact assessment

TITLE Fostering Service Review - Changes to allowances being paid to foster carers
DATE 10/5/2021
LEAD OFFICER. Paul Startup, Head of Corporate Parenting
<p>1 Summary description of the proposed change What is the change to policy / service / new project that is being proposed? How does it compare with the current situation?</p> <p>Foster carers are paid allowances for caring for the children placed with them and in certain circumstances can get additional payments because of the increased needs of the child. This proposed change does not make any fundamental differences to this but proposes increased allowances and some additional benefits. It proposes some changes to some of the conditions around which children will attract additional funding because of their needs. The purpose of the change is to retain existing carers and to attract new carers to foster for Medway Council. The changes affect all foster carers equally irrespective of their individual profile and characteristics.</p>
<p>2 Summary of evidence used to support this assessment Eg: Feedback from consultation, performance information, service user. Eg: Comparison of service user profile with Medway Community Profile</p> <p>The proposed new scheme has been developed by the fostering service in consultation with finance colleagues. It has been shared with foster carers for their feedback. Meetings were arranged and a dedicated email address was set up for feedback. Feedback has generally been positive. Some changes have been made as a result of the feedback given. All foster carers will be impacted by the change.</p>

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3 What is the likely impact of the proposed change?

Is it likely to:

Adversely impact on one or more of the protected characteristic groups

Advance equality of opportunity for one or more of the protected characteristic groups

Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't

(insert Yes when there is an impact or No when there isn't)

Protected characteristic groups (Equality Act 2010)	Adverse impact	Advance equality	Foster good relations
Age	x	x	x
Disability		x	x
Gender reassignment			x
Marriage/civil partnership			x
Pregnancy/maternity			x
Race			x
Religion/belief			x
Sex			x
Sexual orientation			x
Other (eg low income groups)			x

4 Summary of the likely impacts

Who will be affected?

How will they be affected?

All foster carers will be affected by the proposed changes.

The changes to age bands will adversely affect a small group of carers who are currently caring for children who are rising 9 and aged 9 and 10 years. Their payments will be reduced as a result of the changes.

The change back to maintenance and reward payments advances equality as it gives consistency of approach with other Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies and gives clarity on expectations.

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The tiered system of payments for children with additional needs will enhance equality as the system will be fairer for all carers as the criteria on which it is based will be clear and based on an assessment of the child's needs. The matching fee rewards the carer for their skills and experience.

There are no changes in arrangements for pocket money and savings, nor for festival and birthday allowances.

Regarding the changes to respite payments, the current system gives the carers an annual amount (termed a loyalty payment) which could be used to purchase respite care. This scheme disadvantaged those who were caring for more than one child as the payment was the same for all carers. The new scheme advances equality in that it is fairer for all carers who request respite. Feedback from carers argued that the new proposal was also unfair for those carers who did not want to use respite. As a result of this feedback, changes were made to the proposals to give an additional reward to carers who choose not to use respite care, which is beneficial to the children.

The Skills and Services payment replaces the current training payment. Under the current payment scheme, payments are made for completing training. The new scheme will enhance equality as carers will be required to demonstrate that they have met the standards required of them through completion of a competency framework. Some carers may lose financially through this change but they have received advance notification and the new scheme will make this payment fairer.

There is no change to mileage and settling in allowance payments.

The bed-blocking fee advances equality as the policy sets out the circumstances in which it will be paid.

There are some changes to the Parent and Child fees in that there is a proposed reduction for those carers not undertaking assessment work. This advances equality in that it is fairer and clearer for those undertaking the more complex assessment work.

Current carers who undertake this work will in future know the circumstances in which their fee will be reduced.

Connected carers (those who care for a child who is related to them) receive the same changes in maintenance and reward as all generic carers. Under the current scheme they receive training payments but do not receive festival and allowance payments. As a result of feedback from connected carers, under the new scheme they will be eligible for festival and birthday allowances but will not receive the skills and service payment.

Connected carers will now be eligible for the additional matching fee if the child meets the criteria for that payment, thereby enhancing equality.

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The proposed new payments for children with disabilities are additional packages of support not currently available. The aim is to attract carers for these children who otherwise live in residential homes in order to provide them with opportunities for family life. This is advancing equality for this group of children. This will be open to all existing carers as well as new carers.

There are no changes to providers of Supported Lodgings except for an increase in fees.

Regarding the proposals for payment during allegations, this promotes equality and fosters good relations through transparency.
Similarly the proposals for payment of mentors and fostering champions provides clarity on payment and so fosters good relations.
For children missing from placement or in hospital, the proposals provide transparency and advance equality.

There are no changes to overpayments and refer a friend scheme but inclusion provides transparency and fosters good relations.

The proposed concessions are available to all Medway Council foster carers regardless of their address and so enhance equality.

5 What actions can be taken to mitigate likely adverse impacts, improve equality of opportunity or foster good relations?

What alternative ways can the Council provide the service?

Are there alternative providers?

Can demand for services be managed differently?

Adverse financial impacts across all foster carers were analysed. Those caring for 9 and 10 year old children are those most affected by the proposed changes. As a result transitional payments have been agreed for 12 months for those carers currently caring for these children.

Some carers may lose from the change to Skills and Service payment but the new payment is clearer and fairer in implementation and so improves equality of opportunity.

6 Action plan

Actions to mitigate adverse impact, improve equality of opportunity or foster good relations and/or obtain new evidence

Action	Lead	Deadline or review date
Transitional arrangements for payments to carers of 9 and 10 year olds to be put in place.	Hilary Sparling	September 2022

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7 Recommendation

The recommendation by the lead officer should be stated below. This may be: to proceed with the change, implementing the Action Plan if appropriate, consider alternatives, gather further evidence

If the recommendation is to proceed with the change and there are no actions that can be taken to mitigate likely adverse impact, it is important to state why.

Recommendation is to proceed with the change

8 Authorisation

The authorising officer is consenting that the recommendation can be implemented, sufficient evidence has been obtained and appropriate mitigation is planned, the Action Plan will be incorporated into the relevant Service Plan and monitored

Assistant Director

Date of authorisation